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Homelessness in the Russian Federation: Regional and Local Context

By ELENA KOROSTYSHEVSKAYA* and LEYLA GAMIDULLAEVA†

ABSTRACT. The problem of homelessness in the Russian Federation has deep roots in history. Throughout much of the past century, it was a result of displacement of children during revolution, civil war, and wars with foreign powers. Even now, many of the economic problems that cause homelessness in Russia result from sanctions imposed by foreign governments. This article explains the roles of the state and charities in ameliorating the contemporary situation of people without housing. One of the most important programs of one charity involves providing some form of paid work to everyone in the shelters, so that residents can feel a sense of self-worth often lacking in purely charitable ventures. In the long run, no specialized programs that target the homeless can make a dent in the problem unless the state, civil society, and housing developers work together to produce more decent housing in cities and create more jobs in rural areas that are currently facing depopulation. The recent introduction of escrow accounts to reduce fraud in housing finance is already making a difference in promoting increased housing construction.

Introduction

The problem of homelessness in the Russian Federation is very acute. The number of poor has grown as a result of the economic crisis caused by falling oil prices and sanctions imposed by Western countries. There was a 20 percent increase in the poverty rate from 2014 to 2015, leaving 13.4 percent of the population living below subsistence (Agence-France Presse 2016). Official poverty statistics show another 1.5 million people have fallen into poverty since then, bringing the 2019 poverty rate to 14.3 percent (*Moscow Times* 2019).

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These numbers understate the magnitude of poverty in Russia, however. Measuring poverty by those who cannot buy anything beyond subsistence requirements, a report issued by a Kremlin research institute places the poverty rate closer to 22 percent of the population (RANEPA 2018).

Homelessness exists because some people are unable to afford housing. The larger the number of poor people in a society generally translates into a larger number of people without housing. Each year, about 1,000 homeless people die in the streets of St. Petersburg. The number remains almost unchanged from year to year, despite several warming centers, and a mobile and stationary shelter opened by the city's forces (Nochlezhka) and by Maltese Relief Service charity organizations. Some homeless people die directly from exposure (freezing); others die of opportunistic illnesses brought on by the stress of homelessness: heart attacks, strokes, or pneumonia. In Moscow, 2,674 homeless people died in 2018; there was only one metropolitan warming center with several hundred places, located in Lublino (Kurilova 2019).

The problem of homelessness arises from a number of factors, each of which constitutes an obstacle to changing the condition.

First, there is a conflict over the source of responsibility for dealing with homelessness. This is not only a social issue; it is also a matter of the personal responsibility of homeless people themselves. The state takes some responsibility, but it cannot solve the life problems of citizens.

Second, the federal government seeks to shift most responsibility to the regions, but the latter are in no hurry to establish effective programs. In fact, local and regional authorities do not know the number or characteristics of the homeless people in their area. Most sub-federal jurisdictions would prefer to avoid dealing with homelessness, if possible.

Third, there is a conflict between the homeless and the rest of society. Many people who live a secure existence demand that homeless people be isolated, so that their presence does not irritate and frighten respectable citizens. Finding ways to form partnerships across this social division seems difficult. There is a lot of aggression towards

homeless people. As sociologist Grigory Yudin (2019), professor of the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, summarizes the situation:

This is an area of so-called harmful egoists. We are masters in our own land. We don't like that there will be homeless people nearby. These are the feelings of local residents who are afraid of the homeless people. But these are neighbors. There is a conflict here. There are different points of view. A democratic solution is needed, but it is necessary to be prepared for conflict if one cannot agree ... either to engage in conflict productively or to look for a "good uncle" (the state). The Moscow Mayor requires a democratic resolution of the problem. The main tool here is the moderation necessary for a productive resolution of the conflict, a request for local self-government in order to control the territory.

One partial solution to these conflicts may be found in new forms of architecture. The Second Russian Youth Architectural Biennial was held in the Tatar Innopolis at the end of October 2019, where Russian architects under the age of 35 were given a chance to show their work. One innovation that young architects propose is housing that will allow a combination of poor and rich citizens to live under the same roof. This arrangement enables occupants to consider many of the special needs that may arise among their neighbors (Duel 2019).

Concept of the Homeless

Homelessness is a social phenomenon that is widely considered to have the following characteristics: complete cessation of communication with family, parents, relatives; living in places not intended for human habitation; obtaining livelihoods in socially unacceptable ways, such as begging and theft; and submission to informal laws (Nechaeva 2001).

The official concept of homelessness in the Russian Federation is very restrictive. Only people who do not have housing, spend the night where they have to, and carry all their belongings are classified as homeless. People who lack secure, independent housing are not considered homeless unless they live on the street. Accordingly, citizens who are registered as living with relatives, with acquaintances, or

in rental housing are considered members of private households and cannot be considered homeless, regardless of how precarious their shelter is (RCCSHR 2019).

The term “bum” refers to persons without a permanent place of residence (occupation and registration). They are down and out, but they are not necessarily homeless. They live without registration at various random addresses, often in dens, sewers, or abandoned buildings.

The lack of a clear definition of homelessness or method of counting their numbers leads to confusion over the size of the homeless population. It is impossible to evaluate the reliability of existing data or to conduct a comparative analysis of categories and regions. So, according to Sergei Mironov, the chairman of A Just Russia political party, there are from 3 to 5 million homeless people in Russia. By contrast, Rosstat (the Federal Statistical Service) asserts that there are no more than 65,000 homeless people. This number refers to those people, during the census, who have no fixed abode and spend the night in random places outside and carry their belongings with them (*Kommersant Science* 2019).

There is no regional information on the exact homeless population. For example, data differ on how many people in St. Petersburg need an overnight stay. The *Nochlezhka* charity of that city reckons 50,000–60,000 people actually live on the street because they have no housing. That estimate may be compared to the official city estimate of 2,000 homeless. The Maltese Relief Service focuses on 5,000 to 6,000 homeless street people to whom it provides services (Kurilov 2019).

Ideas about the homeless people in Russia and in Europe are very different. European homeless people are divided into three categories: 1) those who have not lived in their own home for a long time but are in shelters, nursing homes, or other institutions, 2) those who are in temporary housing—from emergency housing to various shelters, and 3) those who live on the street (Rogozin 2019). At the highest levels, there are efforts to broaden the definition of homelessness in Russia to come closer to the general European definition (RCCSHR 2019).

Causes and Consequences of Homelessness

Both Russian state officials and charities have a tendency to reify the homeless, using the characteristics of “ideal types.” Our private

correspondence with staff from Nochlezhka (a St. Petersburg charity) revealed that they have classified the “typical” homeless person as a statistical composite: a middle-aged man (median, 46 years old), with a secondary specialized education (44 percent), and Russian citizenship (87 percent).

By thinking in terms of statistical “types,” agency staff are also prone to think of homelessness in terms of the visible characteristics of individuals. That leads to a very common practice of reducing a *social* problem to a bundle of pathologies found in individuals. Through this logical process, the victims of social conditions that promote pathologies come to be viewed as the cause or source of those pathologies. By *blaming the victim*, the state is absolved of responsibility for conditions that only the state can rectify.

Thus, according to the Russian Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights (2019), the main causes of homelessness, and the percentage of cases they apply to, are:

- moving to another city in search of work (49.8);
- family turmoil (34.3);
- fraud or extortion (18.6);
- loss of ability to rent housing (11.5);
- loss of work (10.7);
- release from prison (8);
- alcohol or drug addiction (7.2);
- sale of single housing (5.3);
- illness/injury (5.1);
- unsecured orphans after the orphanage (3.3);
- other (16.6).

Nochlezhka concurs with that list, according to its leader Grigory Sverdlin. Even though some items in the list—moving in search of work, loss of work, cost of housing—point to macroeconomic conditions that are beyond the control of individuals, the tendency is still to attribute those factors to individuals.

When the agencies and officials who deal with the homeless have these attitudes, it is not surprising that the public endorses the view that homelessness stems from personal characteristics and choices.

The standard view of what causes homelessness is fatally flawed. The conditions that are often considered causes are actually *consequences* of homelessness. Experts attribute homelessness to many sources that lie outside the individual. Slutsky (1998) argues that homelessness is caused by socioeconomic factors, such as wars, revolutions, famines, and natural disasters, as well as economic crises, unemployment, poverty, child abuse and exploitation, and family conflict. The Federation Council points to the destruction of the state infrastructure of socialization and parenting, as well as the crisis of families (increased poverty, worsening living conditions, destruction of moral values, and educational setbacks), as the main causes of rising homelessness (Klimantova and Fedotovskaya 2002: 24). Illegal migration of children from the former Soviet republics, where there are armed conflicts and terrible economic conditions, is also a factor in the growth of homelessness (Moscow Center for Street Children 2002).

In Soviet Russia, homelessness, mostly of children, was associated with revolutions, wars, and the complete disruption of the economy. This historical perspective allows us to see the deep socioeconomic roots of homelessness—not as an individual failure but as symptoms of a social crisis. The most fundamental explanation of homelessness in Russia today lies in the nature of capitalism. In the USSR, the emphasis was placed on social education and state custody of children. The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1972) indicates that a successful struggle against child homelessness is possible only in a socialist society, where the causes of this phenomenon are eliminated. Under capitalism, the psychology of individualism and the moral isolation of the individual from the interests of society contribute to the development of child homelessness.

The problem of homelessness acquired enormous proportions in post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s as a result of the transformation to a market economy. Homelessness is simply one feature of a system that allows people to be abandoned and forgotten if they have no work and no money. A couple of examples compiled by Sergeev (2019) reveal how the homeless themselves regard their situation:

A typical situation is the case of Uncle Pasha or Pavel Komyagin. He said that he came to Petersburg in 1988, lived in his room in Dostoevsky Street,

and worked in a landscape gardening industry that collapsed in the 1990s. "I tried to find another job in vain. I was moved out from housing for non-payment. Until 1990, everything was fine with me," says Uncle Pasha. "How do you live now?" "I don't. I'm wandering around. I'm 55 years old, and it's hard to get a job."

"How did you end up in the street?" I asked a middle-aged man wearing a solid warm sweater. His name is Sergey Gorbunov. As he said, that was not the first time that he had come to the warming station. "It is a complicated and not very interesting story," the man replies, dropping his sad eyes. "I'm an orphan, originally from the Pskov region. When I could no longer afford a private apartment, then it started to spin. ... I found myself in the street, and had to survive." In *Nochlezhka*, Sergey was helped to recover documents and is supported in finding a job. But he has no housing. "Everyone has a story to tell," he says. "The beginning can be different, then everything is like everyone else; it's bad. I have been living this life for many years. People are different in the street. I want to find a normal job, to earn money with my own hands, just honest work. To find my own home, get on my feet, so to speak."

The homeless value employment, and it is closely related to the quality of life of people. There are millions of poor citizens in Russia. Many of them lost their jobs in agriculture and small towns. They need help finding work to get a stable income. The unemployment rate, as well as the level of labor productivity, are the most important indicators affecting social stability.

Why Homelessness Grows Worse

The problem of homelessness is getting worse in contemporary Russia because capitalism is permitting the creation of a class of marginalized people with a very limited connection to the economy. To understand the true dimensions of the problem, we need to look beyond the people who are currently living on the street and expand the scope of analysis. We need to consider the condition of the entire lower class, which is comprised of episodic workers and other marginalized workers. Danilenko (2012) estimates the lower class accounts for about 7 percent of the economically active population. Tikhonova (2011) expands that estimate to 23 percent by including a "zone of formation" of the potential lower class, of whom 80 percent live in towns

and villages. Since 59 percent of the emerging lower class consists of women, of whom two-thirds have children and raise them alone, we can observe the beginning of a self-reproducing lower class, characterized by a “culture of poverty” (Tikhonova 2011).

“The most disenfranchised category of ‘extremely poor,’ are unaccompanied minors,” says sociologist D. Rogozin (2019). They are virtually invisible to authorities because, if they appear, they will be immediately delivered to state institutions. Not surprisingly, minors avoid dealing with officials. As a result, it is difficult to judge the real scale of homelessness among minors.

A Chronicle of Homelessness in Russia: 1917–2019

During most of the 20th century, the problem of homelessness in Russia primarily involved children who had lost their parents. The USSR experienced two big waves of homeless children: during the Civil War and during the Great Patriotic War. The post-war devastation in the country led to the emergence of mass child homelessness. Their numbers grew rapidly from 30,000 in 1917 to 6,000,000 in 1921, then declined by 4,000,000 in 1923, and to less than 300,000 for the rest of the decade.

First Wave: Civil War

In 1917 and 1918, the problem of homeless orphans was sufficiently limited that charities, such as the League for the Salvation of Children, and local governments were able to assist them. In 1919, the state officially recognized the problem, and the Council of People’s Commissars established the Council for the Protection of Children. As the number of homeless children grew, they formed gangs for self-protection. A special police force to deal with orphans was formed.

In 1921, a commission to improve the lives of children was formed, the main activity of which was the assignment of children and adolescents to boarding schools. By this time, gangs of homeless youth were becoming a threat to public order. The Re-education Network project was launched in response. “Closed institutions” were created to engage difficult teenagers in a strict pedagogical regime. By 1925, 258

such institutions were operating, where 16,000 children were brought up. Workhouses in cities and labor colonies (correctional institutions) in rural areas were also established.

The Soviet feature film *Road to Life* (1931) portrayed the re-education of adolescents in a Bolshevik labor commune. It tells the story of a gang of street children, one of many such gangs operating in Moscow. In December 1923, police captured about 1,000 gang members and put them in orphanages. Many escaped from any orphanage to which they were sent. Some were then sent to a prison for minors. But others were sent to an experimental labor commune that was supposed to be managed by the children. The idea was for them to work productively and learn to support themselves with work rather than crime. The film indicates these good intentions were rarely realized in practice. Formerly homeless children did not necessarily become honest hard workers.

Nevertheless, the effort to reform street children was a major social project of the 1920s and 1930s. This reveals the magnitude and visibility of the homeless problem in that period. In 1928, the task was set forth of eliminating child homelessness in the shortest possible time. Urban orphans were sent to the countryside to live with peasant families. Various incentives were provided to encourage peasant families to take in an orphan. By 1935, mass homelessness was substantially reduced, although the half-hearted efforts by state officials and the public permitted the problem to persist. Juvenile hooliganism was diminished, and parents were required to take increasing responsibility for raising children. Thus, the effective reduction of mass child homelessness to a manageable level took about 15 years (Krivonosov 2003). The success of this policy is amazing, given the economic dislocations that occurred as a result of the October Revolution, World War I, the Civil War, and the painful industrial development that took place under the first five-year plan (Dobb 1966).

Second Wave

During the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) and in the first post-war years, the government of the USSR took measures to combat the crimes that homeless minors committed due to neglect and financial

hardship. The fight against vagrancy was intensified in the last years of I. V. Stalin. As of 1951, it became punishable by transfer to a "remote area" for five years. Beggars and vagrants were required to accept employment. In 1961, the penalty for vagrancy was reduced to two years in prison or 6–12 months of correctional labor. That penalty remained in place with some variations for the next 30 years.

In effect, the Soviet Union had no homelessness since vagrancy was a crime. If anyone was caught living on the street, he or she could be sent to prison. The problem was "solved" by criminalizing homelessness.

New Wave—Post-Soviet Period

Homelessness has reappeared in the post-Soviet era because it is now allowed. Vagrancy per se is no longer a crime. Begging is a criminal offense, punishable by six years in prison. In addition, the vagrancy of a minor is still a criminal offense.

A new increase in the number of homeless children has been observed in Russia since the beginning of the 1990s. Factors of child homelessness were such phenomena as the economic crisis, poverty, unemployment, weakening of family foundations, moral and psychological crisis, and the spread of mental illness (Nechaeva 2001).

In November 2013, the Moscow Department of Social Protection proposed legislation to register homeless people who voluntarily came to specialized resocialization centers. They would also receive medical care, a pension, a job offer, and even the right to vote. Those who refused would be registered as vagabonds, kept in closed institutions, and even sent to the army. The cost of the initiative was estimated at 3.5 billion rubles. It was not adopted.

In the USSR, the homeless problem was solved much more consistently and effectively than in modern Russia. As a result of the competent policy pursued by the Soviet government, significant results were achieved in solving this problem. It is necessary to take into account the unique Soviet experience with regard to helping the homeless in difficult internal and external conditions for our country.

Ways to Help the Homeless*State Assistance to the Homeless*

State-financed assistance to homeless people is provided directly by 134 social institutions with 8,000 beds. They give out food and clothes, help in the restoration of documents and employment, and provide psychologists and lawyers. Those institutions are supervised by the Ministry of Labor. Olga Sosnina, Deputy Director of the Department of Demographic Policy and Social Protection of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, explains why state-supported shelters and social adaptation centers are not intended for long-term residence nor for people who have arrived from other regions: “People must leave these institutions as they solve their problems, because [the institutions] need to help others” (Molokanov 2019).

Many jurisdictions within the Russian Federation—Belgorod, Voronezh, Kostroma, Kursk, Murmansk, the Ulyanovsk regions, and the Altai Republic—are ill-equipped to deal with homeless people. There are often no state or municipal social shelters (inns), social adaptation centers, or warming centers for homeless people. Where they exist, they are unable to provide social services to all those in need.

In the vast majority of regions, there is no special “social patrol” service authorized to take such a person from the street, deliver him to a temporary care institution, arrange sanitation, undergo fluorography, and provide food and hygiene products. In particular, only two social adaptation centers with a total capacity of 15 and 40 beds operate in the Moscow region located in Dmitrov and the Klinsky district, and there is no “social patrol” service.

Representatives of nonprofits that help the homeless criticize the work of government agencies. Only those with local registration are accepted there, but in Moscow, only 14 percent of those living in the street are Muscovites. The same problem exists in the area around Moscow. “Migrants can be settled in a state shelter only through a court and even then after six months of waiting,” according to Ilya Kuskov, Director of the Warm Welcome reception in Khimki, a social rehabilitation center for the homeless. “And in a number of regions there is not a single state shelter for the homeless” (Molokanov 2019).

The state does not pay enough attention to solving the problem of homelessness. Hence, there is the need to expand the participation of all interested parties in overcoming it, attracting new actors here.

State Public Assistance

The problem of homelessness requires increased participation of representatives of civil society. At the 66th special meeting of the Russian Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights (RCDCSHR), the following recommendations were made.

First, develop a state program to provide comprehensive and affordable assistance to homeless people.

Second, provide social assistance to the homeless, including “social patrol” services. Organize foster families for homeless people with limited mobility.

Third, create a means of documenting persons whose identity has not been established. This involves improving the registration system of citizens of the Russian Federation and imposing penalties on those who live without registration and who use fictitious registration.

Fourth, overcome obstacles to the realization of social and other fundamental rights and freedoms by the homeless. Some of the problems encountered by the homeless are:

- Admission discrimination in organizing social services.
- Employment issues.
- Refusal to assign a social pension.
- Problems in the implementation of social rights and the right to housing.
- Problems of access to medical and health care.
- Failure to include persons infected with AIDS or tuberculosis in the Federal Register.
- Lack of the concepts, criteria, and procedures for “special social protection.”
- Inaccessibility of urgent social services.
- Ensuring elementary financial self-sufficiency and housing literacy.
- Problems of tariff regulation in the field of social services.
- Limited forms of social services and medical care.

Fifth, improve the activities of socially oriented nonprofit organizations engaged in the life management of homeless people. The importance of this area of assistance to the homeless will increase. At the same time, it is necessary to clearly understand what role the state should play in solving the problem of the homeless and the issues for which civil society can take responsibility. Constructive interaction between the state and nonprofits is essential in the fight against poverty.

The RCDCSHR favors programs and humanitarian projects that will satisfy basic human needs. Social assistance, legal support, and psychological counseling will allow the homeless to gain stability faster. With that sort of help, 60 percent of residents in rehabilitation programs at the shelter of the Nochlezhka charity managed to rejoin mainstream society. Every year, almost half of the homeless people who are temporarily employed in the workhouses of the Noah Industrious Houses find a permanent paid job, which allows them to solve their housing problem on their own.

The RCDCSHR also recommends evaluating the effectiveness of assistance programs on the basis of target indicators, namely: the number of people whose quality of independent life has improved significantly (found a job, applied for a pension, or rented or received housing, or were placed in a nursing home for the elderly). Successful programs enable people to get off the street and gain a foothold in ordinary life. Because of the long waiting period to enter a long-term elder-care facility, one possible solution would be to place elderly and disabled people in helping (“adoptive”) families in a manner similar to foster care for orphans.

Charitable Organizations Helping the Homeless

There are public organizations for helping the homeless: Nochlezhka (St. Petersburg), Maltese Relief Service (St. Petersburg), Doctor Lisa’s Fair Help (Moscow), Warm Reception Social and Rehabilitation Center for the Homeless (Khimki), Noah Industrious House (Moscow region), House of Friends (Moscow), and Center for Social Adaptation, named after E.P. Glinka (Moscow). The concentration of charitable organizations in Moscow is explained by the rapid development of the capital

and its enormous resources relative to other regions, including the northern capital (St. Petersburg).

In general, many state-managed programs for the homeless have been transferred to private charities or nonprofit organizations. A plan has been in place since 2015 to transfer up to 10 percent of funds allocated for the implementation of programs for social support of the country's population to socially oriented nonprofit organizations.

Major support for charities comes from business, often in the form of in-kind contributions: a fuel company supplying diesel fuel, fashionable city restaurants providing hot dinners and paying for tent work, an organization for motorist assistance paying for a night bus driver who carries dinners to people sleeping in tents, and shoes donated by a well-known Danish shoe concern. These are examples of the ways in which businesses help charities on the level of wholesale supplies (Sverdlin 2016).

NOCHLEZHKA (ST. PETERSBURG). To accommodate hundreds of homeless residents, Nochlezhka offers two army tents on Skipper Channel and Polytechnic Street, which it heats with heat guns. It costs Nochlezhka around 230 to 310 rubles per night per person, depending on the season and other factors. The budget for the season is 2.8 million rubles. Financing comes from state financing (10 percent), charitable foundations (15–20 percent), private business (25 percent), and small, private donations (50 percent). Director Grigory Sverdlin explains that business and private donations grew from nothing to the primary source of funding in 10 years. He attributes that to the high level of accountability Nochlezhka provides when it publicly reports how every ruble is raised and spent. Business people especially like Nochlezhka's systematic approach to homelessness. In addition to shelters, Nochlezhka has laundries, showers, warming centers, psychological assistance services, and treatment of alcohol addiction. Sverdlin projects a full-fledged assistance system in St. Petersburg in the future, when there are 20–30 heating points, a dozen laundries and showers in the city, several dozen rehabilitation centers (Kurilova 2019).

Nochlezhka actively interacts with the city authorities. Working together, they plan to erect large heated tents for 50 people, where everyone in need can get a safe and warm overnight stay, a hot dinner and breakfast, medical assistance, counseling, and assistance from a

social worker. Sometimes, medical volunteers come from the Charity Hospital project and provide first aid. The warming station is an entry point to the range of services provided, which include assistance in restoring documents to get off the street permanently. In October 2019, 173 people stayed 994 times for the night in two heating points of Nochlezhka. There was no opportunity to put up an additional tent in winter. But now the city helps accomplish this, and a tent has been recently opened in the Moscow region (Sergeev 2019).

MALTESE RELIEF SERVICE. Also operating in St. Petersburg, the Maltese Relief Service shelters around 500 people at a cost of around 350 rubles per person per night. It operates a 24-hour shelter and a year-round mobile shelter (tent of the Ministry of Emergencies) in Kolomyazhsky Avenue. Since 2015, people with disabilities have been accepted in the tent, and they may stay two months or even longer. Around 60 percent of funding comes from the Social Policy Committee. There are also donations from the parent fund of Maltese International. There are unexpected donors: the Consul of the Order of Malta in St. Petersburg, Mikhail Kusnirovich, has allocated for two years about 1 million rubles to the service canteen for those in need.

AUTONOMOUS NONPROFIT SOCIAL SERVICES NETWORK CHARITY (VOLGOGRAD). This charity provides social services to temporary and long-term residents. Aid comes in the form of social, medical, psychological, and pedagogical services; labor and legal services; emergency services, assistance in obtaining temporary housing; and many basic necessities.

ANO HELP CENTER CHARITY (TYUMEN). The main objective of this organization is to help socially vulnerable people who encounter difficulties. It operates shelters that are as good as state shelters. In 2017, the Tyumen Regional Center for Social Adaptation (a state agency) was transferred to the ANO Help Center Charity, as a result of which the regional budget expenses were reduced, the number of places in the shelter increased from 70 to 120, and an additional warming station was opened.

NOAH INDUSTRIOUS HOUSE. Many nonprofit organizations provide assistance to homeless people without receiving funding from the state or local budgets. Noah House is an example. Homeless people

live in communities, have shelter, food, and receive social, medical, and other services, and perform paid labor activities in conditions of social adaptation. Part of the money they earn is spent on the maintenance of themselves and vulnerable homeless people in the community (elderly people, children, and disabled people). According to founder Emilian Sosinsky:

We have 16 houses of industriousness: 10 of them are profitable workhouses and 6 are social ones. The income from the workhouses does not go to my pocket, but to the maintenance of the social houses, where the most defenseless, who are not able to earn their own living, are located. (Karpenko 2018)

The homeless receive the rest of their earnings themselves, which allows them to plan independent living arrangements. The central principle is no idleness. Every person is expected to work, including the disabled. Jobs are created to give everyone something to earn money in order to “feel like a worthy person with a salary” (Karpenko 2018).

The founder and leader of the Noah Christian Industrious House is Emilian Sosinsky, a former driving instructor, who came to faith at the beginning of the 2000s. Then he chose his Christian ministry and opened the first industrious house in the Moscow region without state support or involvement, saving people on its own. Now there are 16 Noah houses (Kurilova 2019).

Sosinsky lives in an old Khrushchev house with his family and has a salary of 60,000 rubles, being an “average for Moscow.” “My goal is not business. The goal is to get a person off the street so that he can repent and change. Therefore, all the founders of Noah are Orthodox Christians” (Karpenko 2018).

One of the most important consequences of the work of Noah House is the spread of the practice of paying homeless people for their work when they serve as day laborers. Until around 2010, privately owned workhouses in Moscow provided only room and board for homeless people, in return for work that the men performed on construction sites or in other heavy labor or that the women performed on cleaning crews. Based on the number staying in approximately

1,000 of these workhouses, there are 15,000–40,000 homeless people in the Moscow region. Noah House set the example of paying low wages to the homeless workers, and the workhouses have been forced by competition to do the same, with half the wages covering their housing and food costs (Karpenko 2018).

General Problem of Housing in Russia

The work of the state and charitable organizations is essential in addressing the immediate survival needs of the homeless, but the problem of homelessness extends beyond the visible cases of people on the street in a few major cities. The underlying problem is the inadequate supply of housing in the Russian Federation. There is an urgent need to accelerate the development of housing and communal services (HCS).

Despite efforts by the state, progress has been slow. In the “wild 1990s” (when the GDP was falling by 5–15 percent each year), the state took supportive measures for housing as part of its program to ensure stable macroeconomic development and to mitigate acute problems of high unemployment and hyperinflation. The housing stock in Russian cities grew from 1.72 to 2.02 billion square meters from 1990 to 2000, around 30 million square meters per year of *net* additions (Goskomstat 2003: 199, 200). From 1999 to 2008, the Russian economy stabilized at a growth rate of 4 to 6 percent per year as a result of high oil prices and improved institutions (World Bank 2019). However, in the housing sector, only 30–35 million square meters per year of gross housing construction was commissioned, which was not enough even to replace losses from dilapidated housing. Less than half of the former and meager Soviet volumes were erected during that period.

Federal officials hoped to stimulate the reform of HCS and the formation of effective housing management mechanisms. They also sought to introduce resource-saving technologies by providing financial support (Russian Federation 2007). A large-scale state program, “Provision of Affordable and Comfortable Housing and Utility Services for Russian Citizens,” was developed in 2012. Housing construction accelerated: gross construction of 60–65 million square meters of

housing per year from 2009 to 2013 and an average of 70–75 million per year since then (Gurdin 2019). By 2015, the urban housing stock was around 2.7 billion square meters (75 percent of 3.6 billion total), which amounts to a net increase of 680 million square meters since 2000 (Kosareva 2017). Most of that growth occurred after 2008. Another 120 million square meters of habitable space are expected to be built by 2024 (Kryuchkova and Shapovalov 2019). Much of the additional housing will simply replace deteriorating stock.

Despite these efforts, housing became 20–40 percent more expensive per year in big cities instead of becoming more affordable. A typical resident of a Russian mega-city needs at least half a century to save enough to buy a modest 50-square meter apartment (Gurdin 2019). That means, the average citizen of one of these cities can never buy a house.

The Housing and Urban Environment National project from 2019 to 2024 is intended to improve living conditions, make the construction industry modern, and make cities beautiful and comfortable. If successful, it will help Russians avoid having to live in emergency houses—old houses now scheduled for demolition. The project budget was set at 1.07 trillion rubles, including 891 billion rubles from the federal budget. The main tool of the project is a mortgage that encourages construction. By 2024, the rates are expected to drop to 7.9 percent (Kryuchkova and Shapovalov 2019).

The key objectives of the Housing and Urban Environment National project are as follows:

- Providing affordable housing for middle-income families, including purchase options at a mortgage rate of no more than 8 percent.
- Increasing housing construction to at least 120 million square meters per year.
- Increasing by 30 percent the quality of the urban environment and reducing the number of cities with an adverse environment by a factor of two, in accordance with a specific index.
- Creating a mechanism for direct participation of citizens in urban issues.
- Reducing the proportion of the housing stock that is unsuitable for living.

Housing Problems Left Unsolved

While great strides are being taken to improve the general condition of housing in Russia, a thorough solution to the problem of homelessness has been constantly postponed. Two of the issues being ignored are: 1) resettlement of citizens from emergency housing and 2) correction of the current procedures for shared-equity construction.

Resettlement of Citizens from Emergency Housing

Emergency housing consists of houses that were considered, as of January 1, 2007, to be failing and subject to demolition. To encourage citizens to relinquish such housing, the state offers a preferential mortgage and other incentive payments from a revolving fund.

Under a new law, the state provides temporary housing from a revolving fund for up to two years. During this time, the government must either pay for the purchase of a new apartment or provide new housing (RG.RU 2019). When emergency housing is demolished under the provisions of this law, the land cannot be used for commercial development (*Construction Weekly* 2019). According to Vladimir Yakushev, the Minister of Construction, Housing, and Utilities of the Russian Federation:

The new standards for the resettlement of emergency housing stock allow us to offer people the most flexible set of government support measures. In addition, the regions will have the opportunity to spend federal funds on the construction of mobile and rental housing, which is now practically absent.

Resettling residents from emergency housing to temporarily allocated public housing is expected within two years (Trubilina 2019).

There are plans to resettle tens of thousands of citizens from half a million square meters of emergency housing from 2019 to 2024. Of that number, 8,200 people now living in emergency housing should celebrate a housewarming in 2019. The budget of the federal project is 507 billion rubles (Krivoshapko 2019). Some regions are ahead of schedule in resettlement: Moscow, Voronezh, Tyumen, and the

Chelyabinsk regions, as well as the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Five territories are behind schedule: Belgorod, Irkutsk, Samara, Kurgan, and North Ossetia (Krivoshapko 2019).

In villages, progress is particularly slow. For example, in one village of 2,000 people, 85 percent have indicated their desire to leave the village. There are 40 apartment buildings (80 percent of the housing stock) considered to be emergency housing. Only eight buildings are included in the resettlement program. Resettlement is slow because a “passport” has to be created for each family, a document that expresses their preferences regarding location and type of housing. Most villagers want to move to a nearby town where the cost of living is lower and the quality of life is higher (*Komsomolskaya Pravda* 2020). Similar situations reproduce the process of depopulating small territories, especially in eastern Russia, a process that characterized the 1990s.

Rectifying the Situation in the Shared Construction Market

Another major problem in the housing market in Russia is the shared construction market. Under this system, families provide equity funding for housing to be constructed, which enables builders to operate without incurring heavy debt. This is how most housing in Russia is built. There are significant risks, however. In recent years, developers have often defrauded the equity holders by declaring bankruptcy and refusing to provide either housing or the money that was invested. In other cases, there are endless delays. Nearly 20 million square meters of housing space have been affected by these sorts of problems (Gorskaya 2019: 8). Around half of the jurisdictions in the Russian Federation have experienced these problems.

The government initiated reforms in 2017 to prevent future cases of fraud. The state is seeking to make the construction industry more transparent by informing participants of shared construction about the state of the market. In addition, a compensation fund, financed by developers, was created to assist housing equity holders in their relations with developers. The following measures are provided for housing equity holders:

- Exclusion of risks. The fund aims to exclude citizens from financial risks when buying a dwelling in a house under construction.
- Protection of rights. In case of bankruptcy of the developer, the fund protects the rights and legitimate interests of housing equity holders.
- State guarantee. Citizens investing in the construction of an apartment building receive a state guarantee.

The benefit to developers from the implementation of this law lies in a number of points:

- The trust of citizens. The guarantees provided by the fund increase trust in eligible developers, strengthening their reputation.
- Fair competition. New rules for developers create conditions in which unscrupulous developers will cease to exist.
- Compliance with law. The fund monitors compliance of developers with the requirements of Federal Law 214 FZ.

Due to these measures, 400 equity-related problems will be corrected in Russia in 2020.

In addition to the creation of the state-managed fund to protect the interests of housing equity holders, a new model of project financing was developed using escrow accounts, which started operating in 2019. Now, citizens who want to invest in a future apartment do not transfer money directly to the developer, but transfer it to secure bank accounts. Housing equity holders under the old scheme who cannot benefit from the new escrow provisions are paid compensation from the state-managed fund, which began in 2019 (Gorskaya 2019).

According to the Bank of Russia, the number of escrow accounts doubled in the first two months of the new system. Jan Feldman, Marketing Director of Lenstroytrest State Corporation, expects rapid growth in housing construction because of the new rules: “The Russian real estate market has confidently entered a new era of shared construction” (quoted in Fedorov 2019). If the state has actually solved the problem of defrauded housing equity holders, as now seems the

case, then one of the underlying obstacles to housing construction and indirect causes of homelessness will have been overcome.

Conclusion

The problem of homelessness in the Russian Federation consists of two components: 1) the urgent need to provide basic assistance to people who have no housing, and 2) the ongoing need to increase the supply of housing. The people living on the streets of major cities are merely the visible form of a greater problem, according to which a large segment of the population remains ill housed. Both elements of the problem have to be addressed.

The housing shortage in Russia is not new, and state officials have been working for decades to solve this problem. Despite those efforts, the problem in Russia remains acute, and no significant improvement in the situation is likely in the near future. Hence, the following tasks are important and urgent: 1) making it feasible for at least half of Russian families to purchase a house, either with their own funds or by borrowing; 2) satisfying the general need of the population to improve housing conditions; and 3) transitioning from the construction of merely functional housing (measured solely in square meters) to the formation of a comfortable urban environment aimed at the efficient use of land.

Nikita Khrushchev, General Secretary of the Communist Party after 1954, provides a model of what is possible if the government takes an active role in improving housing. Through his initiatives, people were able to move out of barracks, dormitories, and huge communal apartments into their own apartments. But we must also consider the housing problem in terms of the plight of homeless people. The plight of the unhoused must always be considered alongside the condition of those who are poorly housed.

Thus, it is important to look at the problem of homelessness as part of a larger task of poverty reduction. The 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded for a new approach to fighting global poverty by using rigorous methods of evaluation to test whatever program is in place. The problem of poverty is central to the 2020 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly given by the President of Russia V. Putin; its leitmotif is “saving the nation.”

There is a need for a systematic solution to the problem of homelessness in Russia, rather than reduction of its scope. This approach is being adopted gradually. We can see it, for example, in the views articulated by the Russian Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights. It recognizes the importance of defining the roles that the state and civil society should play in addressing the issue of homelessness.

Unlike the developed countries of the world, employment, not housing, is the key to solving the problem of homelessness in Russia. There has been a high level of migration for 30 years from villages and towns to cities by people in search of employment. But Russian cities are not prepared to provide housing for this flow of migrants. The solution to the problem of homelessness may involve methods of creating employment opportunities outside of Moscow in small towns, villages, and settlements, especially in the far eastern territories of the country. If some method can be found to reverse the population outflow from rural areas in the east to cities in the west, many of the housing problems of the nation could be solved.

Any examination of the problem of homelessness in Russia today should consider the historical experience of the former USSR. An important legacy of that era that shapes current actions is the recognition that the state needs to take an active role to maintain a livable environment for citizens, including the urban environment. In addition, the experience of the USSR is important in taking seriously the necessity of maintaining constant vigilance to protect the security and sovereignty of the nation against adverse elements. The Russian Federation does not necessarily have the luxury of focusing its attention solely on housing needs when the structural integrity of the nation is under attack.

This situation confirms the single biggest lesson about homelessness, namely, that we must address this problem comprehensively, not only in terms of visible symptoms. In order to do this, all parties must work together cooperatively: government, advocacy groups, charities, civil society, and the media. The owners and managers of the media have a particular responsibility to enable the public to understand the actions of all organizations that are working to solve this problem. This ensures an interactive connection between the government and civil society.

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